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ABSTRACT

This document briefly describes one school district's experiences after deciding on a comprehensive guidance program model. The district chose the model described by Gysbers and Henderson (2000). A description is presented of the development, adoption, and implementation of the program. Staff and program assumptions needed for implementation are given. There is discussion of the ongoing professional development and program evaluation. Advice for other school districts contemplating program restructuring is offered. (ADT)

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Tailoring the Comprehensive Guidance Program Model to Fit Richland County School District One: Building the Foundation

by

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Chapter One

Tailoring the Comprehensive Guidance Program Model to Fit Richland County School District One: *Building the Foundation*

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Richland County School District One is a richly diverse school district. Encompassing most of the land area of the county, it is the third largest school district in South Carolina. With more than 27,000 students and more than 4,000 employees, the district serves the urban population of the state's capital city, Columbia, as well as surrounding suburban and rural areas.

In selecting a program model, the district personnel were aware that whatever model they selected had to be flexible and adaptable in order to address the multitude of community needs. These needs included a comprehensive student-centered program; a curriculum that was developmental rather than reactive in scope; and a systemic approach to student personal, social, educational, and career development. In addition, the model had to support the goals of the district's five-year strategic plan, which called for realistic goal setting for students, an increase in parent involvement, an increase in the graduation rate, and a decrease in the unemployment rate of high school graduates.

After careful review and consideration, the district adopted the model described by Gysbers and Henderson (2000) as its model for program restructuring. The two major attractions of this model can be identified simply by the terms *comprehensive* and *developmental.* The district needed a program model that was more than a listing of services. It needed a guidance program that was an integral component of each student's educational process. In addition, the district wanted a program that would assist all students to acquire age-appropriate competencies related to career, educational, personal, and social pursuits.

The Development, Adoption, and Implementation of the Model

The process of developing, adopting, and implementing a comprehensive and developmental guidance program is a demanding, ongoing, and rewarding experience. As one layer of need is identified and addressed, another layer is exposed. For example, as program modules and curriculum frameworks were developed, the need for additional staff training became apparent. School districts beginning this process need to be aware that the work of restructuring is inevitably a three- to five-year process. In many cases the first year is consumed with current program assessment and the development of a new written program. Years two and three become training, implementation, and evaluation years. Although some personnel may become frustrated when major changes are not apparent in the short term, they need to remember that just as their current program did not reach its present state in a year, it will not be changed in one year either. Commitment, hard work, clear communication, and support are critical factors during the process of program restructuring.

It was apparent that the district needed to make a significant change in the direction of its guidance and counseling program. With this goal in mind, the following chart was developed as a framework for organizational change (see Table 1).

Table 1. School Counseling: A New Direction

FROM:	TO:
Position	Program
Ancillary services	Planned components
Remedial only	Developmental and preventive
Reactive	Proactive
Administrative or clinical	Educational
Some students served	All students served
Office services	Direct services (students, parents, and colleagues)

District personnel recognized that once a model and philosophy were adopted, certain staff and program assumptions had to be identified as cornerstones of the comprehensive developmental guidance and counseling program. Again, borrowing from the work of Gysbers and Henderson (2000), the following assumptions were written. Combined with the district's philosophy, these assumptions serve as an introduction to the district's completed program.

Developmental Guidance and Counseling Program Assumptions

For effective implementation of the Richland County School District One Developmental Guidance and Counseling Program to occur, certain staff and program conditions must exist. The developmental guidance and counseling program is based on the following assumptions.

Staff Assumptions

- School counselors shall be fully certified by the South Carolina State Department of Education and shall have the requisite training to fulfill their responsibilities and specialized job assignments.
- School counselors shall maintain and operate within the guidelines of the ethical standards prescribed by the American School Counselor Association.
- The counselor will completely and professionally carry out the following five basic roles (these roles are defined further in the program components): (Gysbers & Henderson, 1997)
    1. Program management
    2. Guidance
    3. Counseling
    4. Consultation
    5. Coordination
- The counselor is an integral part of the school community team, which includes teachers, administrators, specialists, parents, health professionals, and other community representatives.
- Conditions for effective program implementation will include administrative commitment to and support of the guidance program, favorable interpersonal relations among the school staff, adequate physical resources, adequate time for the delivery of services, and an adequate budget.
- The counselor-to-student ratio shall be appropriate to implement the comprehensive guidance program as designed in this framework.

Program Assumptions

The guidance program:

- serves equally all students, parents, teachers, and other recipients regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, cultural background, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, learning ability level, or language;
- guarantees the student access to the counselor and the counselor access to the student;

- helps develop and protect students' individuality;
- helps students function effectively with others in the school, home, and community;
- helps all students develop competencies at all educational levels;
- assists students in their personal, social, career, and educational development;
- provides consultation and coordination services to the teachers, parents, administrators, and others who work with students;
- provides developmental as well as preventive and remedial services;
- is both an integral part of and an independent component of the total education program;
- is continuously refined through systematic planning, designing, implementing, and evaluating.

Ongoing Professional Development

In the area of professional development, the district became aware that its guidance staff had diverse training backgrounds. School counselors were at many different levels of counseling skills and program management techniques, ranging from minimum coursework for certification to advanced degrees in counseling. Beginning in the 1993–94 school year, the district initiated a detailed program of staff development designed to address the professional needs of its school counselors. Topics for professional development included cross-cultural counseling, strategies for parent involvement, small-group counseling, public relations, and skills in consultation. Based on yearly needs assessments, the district now contracts with consultants across the country to provide state-of-the-art staff development sessions for its counselors. These sessions are held monthly and provide counselors with current and practical strategies related to the requirements of their programs.

Program Review and Refinement

A major and ongoing initiative for the Richland One (or any districtwide) guidance program is the review and updating of all program components. Standards, competencies, and strategies need to be carefully reviewed on a regular basis to ensure program proficiency and accountability. In Richland One, the written program is reviewed every three years. Since its formal adoption in 1994, the program has experienced two revision cycles. These efforts have assured program alignment with the national

school counseling standards of the American School Counselor Association (1997) and the foundation and competency domains of the SCANS Report (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991). In addition, the competencies from the state program model and the district character education program have been infused into the guidance and counseling program.

Advice for Other Districts

Recommendations for other school districts contemplating program restructuring are encapsulated in six simple principles:

1. Receive and nurture district-level support. The superintendent, program directors, and school board members are key players who need to be involved from the beginning. The understanding and support of top-level leaders sets a tone that is adopted by other district employees, parents, and community leaders. When significant district personnel view the program as important, additional support is much easier to achieve.
2. Involve counselors, teachers, principals, parents, students, and community members in the development of the program. Remember, the more people who assist with this process, the greater the advocate and support base will become. These individuals are strong allies who need to be recruited for advisory and steering committees, and included in program assessment and development.
3. Public relations and accountability are critical in gathering and maintaining support. They are valuable resources in ensuring that the guidance program provides necessary and important services for all students. The use of workshops, in-service presentations, brochures, and public service announcements can assist with this effort. Remember, each day that people don't work for their program, they may be working against it.
4. There is no need to reinvent the wheel. Contacting other school districts and specialists in the field of school counseling can prove very useful. We can all learn from each other's success and mistakes. It is wise to visit other successful school districts and perhaps even develop a mentoring relationship with one nearby. In addition, professional conferences and school counseling–related literature are filled with helpful and practical strategies and techniques.
5. Take your time. Remember that Rome was not built in a day. Expect resistance. Change is not easy for many people. It is better to spend several years developing a quality program than to spend just a few

months developing a program that works only on paper. Be patient, as people and institutions need time to adapt to change. Often the mere mention of change creates apprehension in others. As more people witness the benefits of a successful school counseling program, you will secure more advocates.

6. Continue to hope. Life without hope is meaningless. Hope for our students is critical. So is hope for quality school guidance programs. Remember the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., "Keep your eyes on the prize and carry forth."

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About the Author

Ronald D. Miles, Ph.D., is an educational consultant working with U.S. and Canadian school systems in their efforts to improve student services. Additionally, he is an adjunct professor for several universities in South Carolina. He retired in 2001 as coordinator for guidance and counseling services for Richland County School District One in Columbia, South Carolina, a position he had held for nine years. Previously, he served for 20 years as a school counselor and classroom teacher. He has been recognized by the American School Counselor Association as Guidance Administrator of the Year. He can be reached at dr-ron@sc.rr.com or at 3503 Yale Avenue, Columbia, SC 29205-2759.